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Studies on the poor's patterns of child-rearing and family relationships are summarized and compared with studies on ideal patterns of child-rearing and family life. Educationally achieving families give the child freedom within consistent limits and a wide range of parent-guided experiences. Very poor families limit freedom for exploration and have a fear and distrust of the unknown. Emotionally healthy middle-class families respect the child as an individual whose behavior has multiple causes. Communication between parent and child is encouraged. Very poor families regard misbehavior in terms of concrete pragmatic outcomes; reasons for behavior are not considered. Verbal communication is limited. Middle-class families tend to use democratic child-rearing methods with mild, reasonable, and consistent discipline. The attitudes and behavior of the very poor, more than those of the middle class, tend to be antithetical to a stable, personally fulfilling marriage. Such attitudes and behavior play an important part in the high rate of separation, divorce, desertion, and illegitimacy found among the very poor. A stable, happy marital adjustment of the parents is important to the psychological, social, and educational well-being of the child during childhood, adolescence, and the period when he establishes his own family. Associated outcomes of behavior malfunctioning include difficulties in obtaining and holding a job, in participating in community activities, and in managing homes adequately.					
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Child-Rearing and Family Relationship Patterns of the Very Poor

CATHERINE S. CHILMAN*

POVERTY THAT CONTINUES from generation to generation is a problem of major concern today. This so-called cycle of poverty has many causes. Among them are certain cultural patterns--the ways in which parents in very poor families rear their children and relate to each other. One of the approaches to an expansion of social and economic opportunities for the very poor consists of a variety of action programs directed, at least in part, toward helping families adopt a life style which is more effective in coping with the demands of an increasingly urban, technical, and complex society.

The knowledge on which such programs must be based includes a delineation of significant cultural patterns of the poor in regard to child-rearing and family relationships--an area in which much investigation has already been carried out. These studies are summarized here and the findings compared with those of studies concerned with "ideal" patterns of child-rearing and family life. Finally, the numerous implications of this body of information for service programs and for further research are indicated.

LIMITATIONS OF PAST RESEARCH

The term "subcultures of poverty," is used in this paper rather than the more familiar term, "culture of poverty," because the very poor apparently subscribe

at least partially to much of the middle-class culture while adapting it to their own more disadvantaged situation.¹ Also, it is likely that there are a number of subcultures of poverty based on regional, ethnic, religious, and racial variation within the United States, although most of the published studies have failed to concern themselves with considerations of this kind.

Furthermore, the subcultures of poverty, as discussed here, refer to the subcultures of the very poor, as distinct from those of the stable working class. Until recently, research on low-income culture patterns has tended to treat these two groups together. More gross discriminations have generally been made between middle-class and lower class families. The criteria must be precise to differentiate the working class, the employed poor, the unemployed poor, or the chronically dependent poor. It is highly probable that there are more differences between the very poor (the chronically unemployed or casual, unskilled labor groups) and the skilled labor groups than between the latter and the middle class.² It is also probable that, with the increasing prosperity and economic security of skilled labor, this group is becoming more and more middle class in orientation.

Studies of lower class culture that have been made so far tend to be lacking in methodological precision. Further attention needs to be paid to a more rigorous definition of the nature of the sample (for instance, size of sample, randomness of sampling, and characteristics of the sample--racial, regional, national, religious, age, sex, and a finer delineation of social class level).

*Division of Research, Welfare Administration. Condensed from a monograph soon to be published by the Division.

For references, see end of article.

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Many studies have been based on interview and observation techniques, with insufficient consideration given to issues of reliability and observer bias. While valuable insights can be gained from such methods, there is a tendency to make global generalizations that lack adequate support.

Little use has been made of standardized tests. While such tests have their limitations, including middle-class cultural bias and questionable applicability for subjects who are illiterate, more explorations might be made in this area, including the use of appropriate projective test techniques.

The current interest in the cultural characteristics of various groups has sometimes led to a tendency to forget that individuals within a group do not necessarily have all the characteristics of the socioeconomic group to which they belong. Moreover, most individuals belong to a number of subcultural groups and quite probably draw attitudes and values from each of them.

It seems appropriate also to bear in mind that individual behavior is a prod-

uct of multiple causation. Other factors include the individual's physical constitution, his particular life experience and current situation, and his level of intellectual functioning.

Some of the hazards of quick, simple generalizations have been sketched here. While studies to date regarding the subcultures of the poor are limited in number, scope, and method, it is not realistic to wait for all of the required evidence in order to present some of it. Nor is it realistic to defer action-oriented programs until research has pointed the way with clarity and precision. As a stimulant both to further study and to action programs, the following material is presented, with the recognition that many of the findings summarized here may be changed or modified with time and further research.

CHILD-REARING PATTERNS

While each family has its individual style of living, research findings indicate that certain child-rearing patterns tend

Table 1. Child-rearing patterns found to be characteristic of families of children who are educationally achieving compared with relevant patterns found to be characteristic of very poor families

Conducive (Refs. 3-8)	Low-income (Refs. 2,6,9-15)
1. Child given freedom within consistent limits to explore and experiment.	1. Limited freedom for exploration (partly imposed by crowded and dangerous aspects of environment).
2. Wide range of parent-guided experiences, offering visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile stimulation.	2. Constricted lives led by parents: fear and distrust of the unknown.
3. Goal-commitment and belief in long-range success potential.	3. Fatalistic, apathetic attitudes.
4. Gradual training for and value placed on independence.	4. Tendency for abrupt transition to independence: parents tend to "lose control" of children at early age.
5. Educational-occupational success of parents; model as continuing "learners" themselves.	5. Tendency to educational-occupational failure; reliance on personal versus skill attributes of vocational success.
6. Reliance on objective evidence.	6. Magical, rigid thinking.
7. Much verbal communication.	7. Little verbal communication.

to be more characteristic of lower class than of middle-class parents, as listed in tables 1-4. (In regard to these tables it should be noted that because a pattern has been found to be more characteristic of poor families than of more affluent ones, this pattern is not necessarily predominant in these families. It is also important to recognize that there is a growing body of research which strongly indicates that parental practices apparently have a differential effect on boys and on girls.)

The tables also summarize many of the major findings of a large number of studies of child-rearing practices that are found to be variously conducive to a child's emotional health; educational achievement; social success; and "good moral character," i.e., ability to resist temptation and to be responsible and honest.

When the relevant child-rearing patterns of the very poor are compared with those which are found to be con-

Table 2. Child-rearing patterns found to be characteristic of families of children who are emotionally healthy compared with relevant patterns found to be characteristic of very poor families

(Refs. 3-7, 9, 16-22)

1. Respect for child as individual whose behavior has multiple causes.
2. Commitment to slow development of child from infancy to maturity; stresses and pressures of each stage accepted by parent because of perceived worth of ultimate goal of rearing "happy," successful son or daughter.
3. Discipline chiefly verbal, mild, reasonable, consistent, based on needs of child, family, and society; more emphasis on rewarding good behavior than on punishing bad behavior.
4. Open, free, verbal communication between parent and child; control largely verbal.
5. Democratic rather than autocratic or laissez faire methods of rearing, with both parents in equalitarian but not necessarily interchangeable roles.
6. Parents view selves as generally competent adults.
7. Intimate, expressive, warm relationship between parent and child, allowing for gradually increasing independence.
8. Presence of father in home.
9. Free verbal communication about sex, acceptance of child's sex needs, channeling of sex drive through "healthy" psychological defenses, acceptance of slow growth toward impulse control and sex satisfaction in marriage; sex education by both father and mother.
10. Acceptance of child's drive for aggression but channeling it into socially approved outlets.

(Refs. 2, 10-13, 15, 23, 25, 28-38)

1. Misbehavior regarded as such in terms of concrete pragmatic outcomes; reasons for behavior not considered.
2. Lack of goal commitment, impulsive gratification, fatalism, lack of belief in long-range success; main object for parent and child is "keep out of trouble."
3. Discipline harsh, inconsistent, physical, makes use of ridicule; based on whether child's behavior does or does not annoy parent.
4. Limited verbal communication; control largely physical.
5. Authoritarian methods; mother chief child-care agent; father, when in home, mainly a punitive figure.
6. Low parental self-esteem.
7. Large families; more impulsive, narcissistic parent behavior.
8. Father out of home.
9. Repressive, punitive attitude about sex, sex questioning, and experimentation. Sex viewed as exploitative relationship.
10. Alternating encouragement and restriction of aggression, primarily related to consequences of aggression for parents.

ductive to educational achievement, the contrast is striking (table 1). While it would be premature and overly simple to conclude that disadvantaged families tend to rear their children for failure in school, evidence accumulated to date points in this direction.

Similarly, the opportunity for very poor children to grow up as emotionally healthy individuals would seem to be seriously jeopardized if their parents employ the child-rearing patterns which research indicates to be more typical of low-income families than of middle-class ones (table 2). Very poor parents would also seem to have a tendency to rear their children in ways that tend to be prejudicial to their social acceptability in the usual middle-class group, as indicated in table 3.

The higher rates of delinquency and rejection by authority figures of the children of the very poor are probably related in part to the child-rearing methods used by their parents. Such character traits as honesty, responsibility, dependability, resistance to temptation, and capacity for impulse control would seem to be consonant with adherence to many of the legal requirements set up by our society. These traits also are favored by such success-relevant figures as school authorities and employers. While evidence from research is rather fragmentary in the area of parental practices which

are conducive to producing this "good moral character," that which is available strongly suggests that the children of the very poor have less chance to develop socially desirable character traits than children of other socioeconomic groups (table 4).

While the tables tend to oversimplify the evidence and thus may lead to unwarranted generalizations, they do indicate that lower-class parents tend far more than middle-class ones to bring up their children in ways that are conducive to serious difficulties in the four crucial areas examined. The phenomenon of generation-to-generation poverty may well be associated in part with such parental methods, behavior, and attitudes.

Although it is recognized that, in effect, the dice are loaded against very poor parents in the presentation of evidence such as this, our predominantly middle-class society is also inherently and inevitably loaded against them. Criteria of emotional health, social acceptability, and "good moral character" are all middle-class concepts. Research in these areas is generally built on such criteria. Therefore, it is inevitable that lower class children more often than middle-class ones would fail to meet the standards on which most studies are based. Moreover, schools are basically middle-class institutions; again it is no wonder that lower class children have trouble achieving in such settings.

Table 3. Child-rearing patterns found to be characteristic of families of children who are socially successful compared with relevant patterns found to be characteristic of very poor families

Conducive (Refs. 6,7)	Low-income (Refs. 2, 13, 27, 32, 39)
1. Social skills in dress, manners, speech, games, etc., according to middle-class norms.	1. Little skill in prevalent middle-class behavior.
2. Sensitivity to feelings and attitudes of others.	2. Slight awareness of subtleties of interpersonal relations.
3. Ability to be flexible and conform to group.	3. Tendency to be rigid and non-conforming to middle-class norms.
4. Good impulse control.	4. Poor impulse control.
5. Cheerful, happy, self-assured attitude.	5. Low self-esteem, distrust, tendency to hostile aggression and/or withdrawal.

Table 4. Child-rearing patterns found to be characteristic of families of children who are of "good character"* compared with relevant patterns found to be characteristic of very poor families

Conducive (Ref. 40)	Low-income (Refs. 2, 10, 13, 15, 23, 25, 28-30, 32, 35)
1. Democratic child-rearing methods.	1. Authoritarian methods.
2. Mild, reasonable, consistent discipline.	2. Harsh, physical, inconsistent discipline.
3. Child's capacity for moral judgment, according to basic principles, is viewed as a slowly developing ability.	3. Reasons for child's misbehavior tend not to be considered; specific behavioral outcomes rather than principles considered paramount.
4. Moral values are discussed and clarified.	4. Little verbal communication and discussion.
5. Parents set example by their own behavior.	5. Parental behavior more apt to be impulsive and gratification-oriented.

*Defined as including honesty, responsibility, dependability, and ability to resist temptation.

But this "lack of fit" cannot be tossed aside because it can be explained. The middle-class culture has in part produced our prosperous, technically advanced society; it has also in part been produced by these technical advances. There is a cycle of prosperity, just as there is a cycle of poverty. The individual or family that wishes to participate in the first cycle very probably must abandon the second. For instance, fatalism, apathy, impulsiveness, and lack of goal-commitment ill-serve the person who wants to escape from the urban gray areas into the suburban green ones.

It is also recognized that research findings are dependent on what questions are asked. The weakness of child-rearing methods used by the poor may well be overemphasized in this report partly because of what research personnel have looked for--their hypotheses and related questions.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

Table 5 summarizes the research evidence on attitudes and behavior found to be more characteristic of low-income families as a group than of middle-class ones as a group which concern interpersonal relations between the sexes. It also summarizes the findings that show

a strong association with "good" marital adjustment.

While the summary of findings presented in table 5, like those in the preceding tables, may lead to oversimplification and easy generalizations, it shows that the attitudes and behavior of the very poor tend, more than those of the middle class, to be antithetical to a stable, personally fulfilling marriage. (Although the matter of "personal fulfillment" in marriage is a highly subjective one, the research leading to the findings in table 5 includes a number of studies, done at various times with various populations. Self-ratings as to marital happiness have been most generally used as criteria of personal fulfillment since there is doubt as to whether better criteria exist. Other criteria have also been used, such as lack of separation, desertion, and divorce.) Such attitudes and behavior probably play an important part in the far higher rate of family instability--separation, divorce, desertion, illegitimacy--found among the very poor. Since a stable, "happy" marital adjustment of the parents is important to the psychological, social, and educational well-being of the child, not only during childhood but also as he grows up and establishes his own family, the implications of the tendencies of the very poor toward destructive hetero-

sexual attitudes and behavior are serious indeed. As in the case of child-rearing patterns, it is apparent that the inter-parental life style of this group is more likely to play into the continuing cycle of generation-to-generation disadvantages of the "hard-core" poor than is the inter-parental life style of the middle class. However, as with the findings on child-rearing patterns, it should be noted that concepts of marital happiness and sta-

bility are middle-class in nature and that research findings derive in large part from the questions that are asked.

ASSOCIATED OUTCOMES

Some of the major expected outcomes of the child-rearing patterns and family life styles of low-income parents have already been highlighted. The subcultures

Table 5. Attitudes and behavior found to be prevalent among low-income men and women compared with attitudes and behavior strongly associated with "good" marital adjustment

Good marital adjustment (Refs. 34, 41-51)	Low-income behavior and attitudes (Refs. 2, 10, 23-26, 28, 34, 51-54)
1. Happiness of parents' marriage and lack of divorce in family of origin.	1. High divorce and separation rates of the very poor.
2. High level of self-perceived childhood happiness.	2. Research evidence lacking; professional observation suggests higher levels of childhood unhappiness among very poor.
3. Mild but firm discipline during childhood with only moderate punishment.	3. Severe, harsh, inconsistent punishment in childhood.
4. Adequate sex information, especially from encouraging parents.	4. Repressive, punitive attitudes toward sex.
5. Substantial time of acquaintance and engagement before marriage.	5. Short courtship, marriage often because of pregnancy.
6. Marriage in the middle 20's or older.	6. Teen-age marriages common.
7. Mutual enjoyment of sex relations.	7. Sex regarded as enjoyable only for male, women regarding it as source of economic security; basically exploitative on both sides.
8. Open expression of affection between sexes, confidence in each other, equalitarian, free communication.	8. Little expressed affection, male in dominant role, women aligned against men, little communication, attitudes of mutual exploitation.
9. Joint participation in outside interests, friends in common.	9. Masculine and feminine worlds separate, few friends.
10. Residence stable, in single home.	10. Residence in multiple dwellings, frequent moving.
11. Education at least through high school.	11. Education less than high school.
12. High socioeconomic level, income at least \$5,000 per year.	12. Low socioeconomic level, income less than \$3,000 per year.

*Insofar as studies have been done concerning differences between Negroes and whites, findings indicate apparent differences largely disappear when data are carefully analyzed in terms of strictly comparable socioeconomic levels. Thus studies reporting racial differences are likely to be reporting class differences.

of poverty, in comparison with other cultural patterns, would seem to be more conducive not only to poor emotional health, school failure, social rejection, inadequate impulse control (lack of "good" character), and family breakdown but also to collateral areas of behavioral malfunctioning. These include difficulties in obtaining and holding a job, in effective participation in the various social systems of the community, in adequate home-management and consumer skills, and in political participation as a citizen in a democracy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE

The cultural patterns that have been outlined present numerous implications for development of services for families living in poverty. A few of these implications are:

1. Since the conditions of poverty are likely to promote the subcultures of poverty, it is obvious that such conditions as insufficient income, lack of equal opportunities, poor housing, inadequate schools, exploitation, etc., must be ameliorated in order to produce a milieu in which new behavior patterns can develop and flourish.
2. Since the subcultures of poverty tend to be defeating to the poor, it seems that remedial efforts planned with and for the poor should provide ways in which some of these culture patterns can be modified. While it is generally inappropriate to impose middle-class ways on the disadvantaged, it may well be appropriate to develop plans and services with them that may lead to the achievement of certain middle-class attitudes and behavior, since these attitudes and behavior are more likely to bring about the social and economic rewards generally associated with middle-class membership to which many of the poor aspire.
3. Perhaps the subcultures of poverty could be tentatively diagnosed as being (at least, in the American middle-class value orientation) a comparatively im-

mature system of behavior and attitudes since, in the light of available research, some of their outstanding features are magical thinking, subjective judgment, impulse gratification, use of force rather than reason, alienation from authority figures, lack of goal commitment, distrust of heterosexual relationships, projection of problems on to others, and other similar characteristics.

If it is agreed that these characteristics are more typically associated with childhood and youth than with adult maturity in the middle-class American culture,⁵⁵ does it follow that many of the poor need, in effect, to be guided with the same kind of mild, firm, consistent discipline that research reveals to be so closely associated with positive mental health, educational achievement, "good moral character," and eventual marital success? Such guidance would require modification, of course, in its use with adults.

4. Since a pragmatic, concrete, personal, physical learning style appears to be characteristic of most low-income persons, how can services be designed that will work with, rather than in opposition to, such a style? Clues from a variety of sources indicate that a direct, assertive, specific approach is more effective in group and individual counseling than the more subtle, abstract, insight-oriented approach often used with middle-class clients.⁵⁶ Role-playing and other "learning-by-doing" projects seem to be more effective than strictly verbal approaches to problem-solving.⁵⁷

Considerable experimentation is going on at present in reference to specific structuring of the external environment and direct teaching of individuals to play certain roles in this environment rather than relying on internal personality changes developed from verbalized insights and a therapeutic relationship. By acting differently in a structured situation, some people, at least, seem to begin to feel and think differently.⁵⁸

5. The possible benefits to be gained from cultural enrichment of disadvantaged preschool children presents a direct chal-

lenge. Experimentation and research in ways of overcoming the cultural deficits of poor children at the preschool level are being financed by various programs in the Welfare Administration, as well as by other Federal programs and by foundations.

Experimentation that includes opportunities in cultural enrichment for older children, youth, and adults is going forward in a number of communities.⁵⁹ Such experimentation will doubtlessly increase under the job-training, educational programs, and community development features of the Economic Opportunity Act.

6. Day care centers and homemaker services not only offer needed direct services to many low-income families but also help parents and children learn new cultural patterns and skills by observation and participation.

7. Further training of public welfare staff members in reference to the subcultures of poverty and their implications seems relevant. Such training might be carried forward by a variety of formal and informal arrangements, including inservice training.

In line with its policy of seeking to develop more effective treatment as well as research and demonstration programs, the Welfare Administration through the Office of the Commissioner, the Children's Bureau, and the Bureau of Family Services recently participated in a 3-day national group consultation on parent and family life education. This consultation was planned by the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth and brought together specialized consultants from many professions and from public and voluntary agencies and universities. (Other participating Federal agencies were the Public Health Service, Department of Agriculture, Office of Education, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Department of Labor, and Selective Services of the Department of Defense.) A Federal publication providing guides to services and research in parent education with low-income families will be one of the results of this consultation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Descriptive Research

At the descriptive level, it is clear that more precise and rigorous studies are required in order to obtain more exact information about the various ethnic, regional, racial, and religious subcultures of poverty. A refinement of techniques is called for, with:

1. Careful attention paid to random sampling from a defined population.
2. Adequate sample size and description of sample.
3. Development of testing instruments with due consideration given to their applicability to the research questions of the study and to their reliability and validity.
4. Analysis of data through the use of appropriate statistical methods.
5. Comparison of samples from several defined populations (for example, lower-lower class compared with (a) working class and (b) middle class).

Also, at the descriptive level, it is important to know more about the characteristics of groups of individuals who manage to escape from poverty. If the child-rearing and family life patterns of the very poor do tend to block the chances of the individual to move upward, how do the poor who are upwardly mobile differ from those who are not in reference to the values, attitudes, and practices of their parents and in reference to their own present cultural characteristics? Studies along these lines are in progress, underwritten by Welfare Administration funds.

Since there are usually large differences between the sexes in reference to personality characteristics, interests, aspirations, and values, descriptive studies aimed at differentiating the successful from the unsuccessful "slum child" should be designed with questions directed towards male and female groups considered separately.

Experimental Research

There is a strong need for action re-

search aimed at finding out whether specific treatment programs actually "make a difference." While descriptive studies have their important place in yielding more sophisticated insights and suggesting programs for change, the crucial question is whether these insights and suggestions add up to effective programs. Whether or not such programs actually represent an improvement must be objectively tested, insofar as this is possible.

For example, in a preceding section suggestions were made for various ways of devising services for very poor families which might lead to more effective child-rearing practices and family life style. Programs designed along such lines should be subjected to carefully designed evaluation techniques. Part of this evaluation needs to be focused on behavioral outcomes that can be objectively measured.

Evaluation too frequently is focused on attempts to measure such factors as changes in attitudes and information. One of the outstanding deficiencies of measurements of this kind is that there is no guarantee that changed attitudes and information lead to changed behavior.

For instance, if, as a result of a parent discussion group, parents say that harsh, physical, dictatorial punishment has a bad effect on children, does this mean that they actually abstain from this kind of punishment and substitute in its place mild, consistent, reasoned discipline? To push this point one step further, if parents do manage to behave differently in reference to discipline, does their children's behavior show an objectively observable difference? Theoretically, such a parental change should lead to a reduction in a child's overt aggression in the home, school, and community. Do such changes occur and are they maintained over time?

Long-range behavioral outcomes associated with service programs designed for the very poor include: improved school attendance and academic success, obtaining and holding employment, better handling of family income, improved

housekeeping, better physical health, reduction in deviant behavior, and increase in marital stability.

If goals such as these are reached, which individuals reach them and under what program methodologies and content? For which individuals does the program seem to be a failure? What are their characteristics? We can learn just as much from reported failures as we can from reported successes, although the tendency seems to be to publish reports only of the successes. Does the group served by a program change to a greater extent than a group not served? If behavioral changes are found to occur, do they persist over time?

Experimental programs with an evaluation component need to be repeated with different groups of subjects, with different staff composition, and in different parts of the country in order to find out whether or not the service methodology has general application.

Technical difficulties are present in research of this kind. Measurement of change is one of these difficulties. The Division of Research of the Welfare Administration is currently engaged in an attempt to devise a method of measuring family change that can be used by research personnel as one evaluation method in a number of experimental projects.

Some very difficult research and evaluation questions have been raised here. Finding at least some of the answers will not only add to scientific knowledge and give clues to further research but also contribute to the development of public welfare practice aimed at family and individual rehabilitation and the reduction of economic dependency.

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